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USNMR SHAPE AND USCINCEUR FOR POLADS

E. O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: PINT, BE

SUBJECT: INTERNAL POLITICS: LEBURTON' S FIRST TEN WEEKS

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER LEBURTON AND OTHER TOP PARTY
LEADERS HAVE NOT YET ATTACKED KEY ISSUES OF REGIONALIZATION BUT
THE THREE- PARTY COALITION GOVERNMENT HAS PERFORMED BETTER THAN
EXPECTED. MINISTERS DECLERCQ, CLINNE, VAN ACKER AND VANDERPOORTEN
HAVE PERFORMED PARTICULARLY WELL, WHILE LEBURTON AND
VICE PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS HAVE REMAINED
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JUDICIOUSLY IN THE BACKGROUND. ONLY DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS HAS STUBBED HIS TOE, GENERATING IN THE PROCESS SOME UNFORTUNATE QUESTIONS AMONG CATHOLIC YOUTH ABOUT BELGIUM'S DEFENSE COMMITMENTS. THE OVERALL POLITICAL CLIMATE HAS NEVERTHELESS IMPROVED, AND PROSPECTS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL SURVIVE THE REGIONALIZATION CRUNCH THIS SUMMER ARE SOMEWHAT IMPROVED. END SUMMARY

2. THE SOCIALIST/ SOCIAL CHRISTIAN/ LIBERAL GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER LEBURTON HAS EASED LINGUISTIC TENSIONS SOMEWHAT DURING ITS FIRST TEN WEEKS IN OFFICE EVEN THOUGH IT MADE LITTLE PROGRESS ON THE KEY REGIONALIZATION ISSUES UPON WHICH ITS SUCCESS ULTIMATELY DEPENDS. NONE IS EXPECTED UNTIL THE PRINCIPALS -- LEBURTON FOR THE SOCIALISTS AND VICE PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS FOR THE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS, WITH VICE PRIME MINISTER DECLERCQ AND THE LIBERALS IN THE MIDDLE -- GO TO THE MAT WITH EACH OTHER, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, WITH SOME OF THEIR MORE MILITANT COLLEAGUES. SO FAR LEBURTON HAS NOT DEPARTED FROM WHAT THE PRESS DESCRIBES AS A "DON'T MAKE WAVES" POLICY. OTHERWISE, THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO WRESTLE WITH KNOTTY BUDGETARY, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS WHICH, THOUGH HARDLY RESOLVED, ARE AT LEAST VIEWED WITH GREATER APPRECIATION OF THE HIGH COSTS OF LINGUISTIC POLITICS AND THE COMPLEXITY OF THE FUNDING PROBLEMS INVOLVED. ALSO, THERE APPEARS TO BE A WILL TO SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS. IN THIS PROCESS, AND AS A RESULT OF BELGIAN CHAIRMANSHIP OF EC MINISTERIAL COMMITTEES THAT WILL CONTINUE THROUGH HUNE, SEVERAL NEW STARS HAVE APPEARED IN THE POLITICAL FIRMAMENT AND ONE OLD ONE, DECLERCQ, HAS ACQUIRED NEW LUSTER. ON THE OTHER HAND, DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS' IMAGE HAS AGAIN BEEN TARNISHED IN A LOSING BATTLE WITH STUDENTS, THIS TIME OVER THE END OF EDUCATIONAL DEFERMENTS. MEANWHILE, LEBURTON AS WELL AS VICE PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS HAVE SEEMED CONTENT TO HUSBAND THEIR OWN ENERGY AND ESTABLISH WHAT CREDIT AND GOOD WILL THEY CAN BEFORE THE INEVITABLE SHOWDOWN ON REGIONALIZATION THIS SUMMER AND FALL. THIS APPROACH HAS SERVED BOTH MEN WELL.

3. VICE PRIME MINISTER WILLY DECLERCQ, WHO IS ALSO MINISTER OF FINANCE, HAS ADDED CONSIDERABLY TO HIS STATURE AS A RESULT OF HIS POSITION AS CHAIRMAN, AND SPOKESMAN, OF EC MINISTERS DEALING WITH INTERNATIONAL MONETARY AND ECONOMIC MATTERS, AND ALSO BECAUSE OF HIS KEY ROLE IN GOB CONSIDERATION OF BELGIUM'S OWN SERIOUS BUDGETARY AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PROBLEMS. THE NEW, YOUTHFUL SOCIALIST MINISTERS OF ECONOMICS

AND LABOR (WILLY CLAES, A FLEMING, AND ERNEST GLINNE, A WALLOON) HAVE ALSO PLAYED PROMINENT PUBLIC ROLES IN BUDGETARY AND SOCIAL FIELDS FOR WHICH THEY HAVE WON ACCOLADES FROM ALL SIDES WHILE BUILDING UP MORE SOLID SOCIALIST- LABOR SUPPORT FOR THEMSELVES THAN WAS ENJOYED BY THEIR PREDECESSORS.

NEVERTHELESS, THIS APPPROBATION STILL RESTS MORE UPON THEIR STYLE THAN THE SUBSTANCE OF THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS; THE REAL TEST FOR THEM AND FOR DECLERCQ WILL NOT COME UNTIL THEY ADJUST EXPENDITURES TO REVENUES IN A WAY THAT ACCOMMODATES NOT ONLY NORMAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMS BUT THE HEAVY INCREASES IN EXPENDITURES NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT THE NEW SCHOOL PACT AND REGIONALIZATION SHOULD THESE EVENTUALLY BE APPROVED.

4. MINISTER OF DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS, WHOSE 1966-68 GOVERNMENT STRUCK OUT WITH YOUTH OVER THE LOUVAIN UNIVERSITY CRISIS, IS STILL BATTLING ZERO AFTER STUDENT AGITATION FORCED HIM TO " RECONSIDER " ELIMINATION OF EDUCATIONAL DEFERMENTS UNDER THE GOVERNMENT ' S NEW DEFENSE REFORM PLAN. HIS FAILURE TO SEEK IMMEDIATE CONSULTATIONS WITH YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS ON AN ISSUE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THEM, AND HIS FALSE ASSUMPTION THAT THE SOCIALISTS WOULD SUPPORT HIM ON ALL ASPECTS OF WHAT WAS BASICALLY THE SOCIALISTS ' OWN PLAN, SEEMS POLITICALLY INEPT. FURTHER, IT HAS HAD THE UNFORTUNATE SIDE EFFECT OF GENERATING QUESTIONS ABOUT OTHER ASPECTS OF DEFENSE REFORM, SUCH AS ASSIGNMENT OF CONSCRIPTS TO THE GENDARMERIE TO BOLSTER AND IMPROVE ITS INTERNAL SECURITY CAPABILITIES (THE GENDARMERIE IS CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH SUPPRESSION OF STUDENT EXCESSES), AND EVEN ABOUT BELGIUM ' S DEFENSE COMMITMENT. AS A RESULT, CATHOLIC PACIFISTS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN PLACING THE LARGEST CATHOLIC YOUTH AND YOUNG WORKER ORGANIZATIONS ON RECORD AGAINST MILITARY SERVICE AND MEMBERSHIP IN NATO (SEPTEMBER TO FOLLOW). STRAUSS- HUPE

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5. IN PARLIAMENT, WHERE A SPECIAL COMMISSION MUST REPORT ITS RECOMMENDATIONS ON REGIONALIZATION BY JULY 15, TWO IMPORTANT MEASURES HAVE BEEN PASSED, ONE FOR PENSION ADJUSTMENTS, THE OTHER A CONTENTIOUS PROGRAM (FIRST PROPOSED BEFORE WW II) FOR JOINT PUBLIC/ EMPLOYER COMPENSATION FOR WORKERS INVOLVED IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION. THE SOCIALIST MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS, FRANK VAN ACKER, AND LABOR MINISTER GLINNE RECEIVE MOST OF THE CREDIT. ALSO, A POTENTIALLY DAMAGING FIGHT OVER LIBERALIZATION OF ABORTION AND BIRTH CONTROL LEGISLATION, BROUGHT ON BY PROTESTS OVER THE ARREST OF A COMMUNIST GYNECOLOGIST
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IN WALLONIA, WAS TEMPORARILY DEFUSED BY LIBERAL JUSTICE MINISTER VANDERPOORTEN WHO ACTED AS CONSILIATOR BETWEEN DIEHARD CATHOLICS AND SOCIALISTS. OTHER LIBERALS, WITH DECLERCQ AND EDUCATION MINISTER TOUSSAINT IN THE LEAD, APPEAR TO HAVE PLAYED A SIMILAR ROLE IN FURTHER DISCUSSIONS OF THE SCHOOL PACT, ESPECIALLY COSTLY PROVISIONS FOR STATE ASSUMPTION OF MOST OF THE BURDEN OF PAROCHIAL EDUCATION.

6. PARLIAMENTARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS, ALONG WITH THE WORK DONE BY GLINNE AND CLAES IN SETTLING A NUMBER OF SCATTERED STRIKES AND GAINING ACCEPTANCE IN WALLONIA FOR A MORE REASONED APPROACH TO REGIONAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, HAVE CONSIDERABLY IMPROVED THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN BELGIUM. EVEN THE SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION' S INITIAL REPORTS ON REGIONALIZATION -- ALTHOUGH NOT

TOUCHING ON KEY ISSUES OF WHO WILL SIT ON REGIONAL COUNCILS, WHAT WILL BE THE GEOGRAPHIC LIMITS OF BRUSSELS REGION, OR HOW PUBLIC FUNDS WILL BE APPORTIONED AMONG THE REGIONS-- HAVE BEEN SCHOLARLY AND DEVOID OF POLEMIC. THERE IS THUS A GROWING FEELING THAT EVEN THE REGIONALIZATION ISSUE MAY BE RESOLVED AND, IF SO, THAT THE LEBURTON GOVERNMENT COULD SURVIVE UNTIL NOBEMBER 1975. ONLY THE FLEMISH SOCIAL CHRISTIANS SEEM RESTIVE, A CONDITION ABETTED NO DOUBT BY POLLS WHICH INDICATE THAT THEIRS IS THE ONLY PARTY TO HAVE DECLINED SIGNIFICANTLY IN POPULARITY SINCE JANUARY. AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED, THEIR LOSS OF ABOUT TWO PERCENT WAS THE MILITANT FLEMISH VOLKSUNIE'S GAIN, BUT IN THIS SITUATION MAY REST THE SEEDS OF LATER CRISIS. NOW, HOWEVER, EVEN THE MILITANT LINGUISTIC PARTIES, WHICH COMPRISE THE "RESPONSIBLE OPPOSITION", SEEM RESIGNED TO POSSIBLE CONTINUATION OF THE THREE-PARTY COALITION BEYOND THIS SUMMER; BOTH THE FDF-RW AND THE VOLKSUNIE SAT DOWN WITH THE GOVERNMENT PARTIES TO REVIEW THE PROTOCOL FOR THE NEW SCHOOL PACT, AND THE VOLKSUNIE SUBSCRIBED TO IT. STRAUZ- HUPE

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